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RUEHTV/AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV PRIORITY 0071
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CARACAS 000070

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HQSOUTHCOM ALSO FOR POLAD
DEPT FOR AID/OTI (RPORTER)
DEPT FOR DRL/SEAS (GRICKMAN)

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [ASEC](#) [VE](#) [IS](#)
SUBJECT: CHAVEZ BREAKS RELATIONS WITH ISRAEL/JEWISH
COMMUNITY ALARMED AT RISE IN ANTI-SEMITISM

REF: A. CARACAS 00020
[1](#)B. CARACAS 00032

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Classified By: A/POLITICAL COUNSELOR DANIEL LAWTON, REASON 1.4 (D)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. The Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (GBRV) officially broke diplomatic relations with Israel on January 14. Foreign Minister Nicolas Maduro announced the rupture in diplomatic relations via a communique disseminated via state media that simultaneously condemned Israeli military action in the Gaza Strip. The MFA announcement comes on the heels of the January 6 expulsion of the Israeli ambassador and members of his staff from Venezuela (Ref A). The GBRV's strong reaction to events in Gaza likely appears to have more to do with domestic politics in the lead-up to Chavez's February 15th referendum to eliminate term limits. At the same time, Venezuela's small Jewish community is alarmed at a recent precipitous rise in the number of anti-Semitic incidents, including virulent anti-Israeli graffiti, increased numbers of offensive editorials and cartoons in state sponsored media, and pro-Palestinian government rhetoric. Jewish organizations in Venezuela have received numerous telephone threats, and two prominent Jewish rabbis are temporarily residing outside Venezuela due to security concerns. Cognizant of the GBRV's antipathy toward the United States, Venezuelan Jewish leaders are not seeking USG assistance at this time. End Summary.

Venezuela Breaks Relations With Israel

[1](#)2. (SBU) The GBRV announced its suspension of diplomatic relations with Israel on January 14. In a communique disseminated by state media, Foreign Minister Nicolas Maduro expressed Venezuela's solidarity with a similar decision taken by President Evo Morales in Bolivia, and simultaneously called on the international community to punish Israeli leaders via the International Criminal Court for the military action taken in Gaza. According to the official statement, "The Government of Venezuela broke diplomatic relations with Israel in protest over the offensive in the Gaza Strip and the attitude of the Hebrew State, which has not taken into consideration the calls of the international community to end the violence." The GBRV's announcement comes on the heels of the January 6 expulsion of the Israeli ambassador and members of his embassy staff.

Anti-Semitism Increasing

13. (SBU) There has been a marked increase in anti-Israel/anti-Semitic graffiti in Caracas and other Venezuelan cities following the military action in Gaza. Intolerance is typically expressed through the use of symbols equating the State of Israel with fascism, such as graffiti painted on the walls of the cathedral in Maracay depicting the Star of David with a swastika inside accompanied by the words "Israel and Assassins." Poloff observed a car in Maracay painted with the words "Arrest the Jews" across the rear windshield. Similar graffiti and anti-Israeli rhetoric has been spray-painted in locations in Caracas, including the National Assembly, downtown plazas and office buildings, and the perimeter walls of the Maripuez synagogue (Ref B).

14. (SBU) The pro-Government Diaro VEA newspaper has published several offensive political cartoons and editorials related to Israel's intervention in Gaza. For example, a December 30, 2008 VEA cartoon depicts two skeletons representing the United States and Israel surrounded by a pool of Palestinian blood congratulating themselves. A January 15 VEA cartoon depicts a Palestinian man holding a dead child accompanied by the words "Get Out of Palestinian Territory Zionist Assassins." In November 2008, VEA printed editorials and cartoons accusing the opposition Miranda State Governor Henrique Capriles Radonski of being a Zionist in the pocket of Israel. Although state media criticism of the United States and Israel is not new, the scope and intensity of the rhetoric have increased since the military action in Gaza began.

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15. (C) David Bittan, First Vice-President of the Confederation of Jewish Associations in Venezuela (CAIV), told poloffs January 12 that CAIV and other Jewish organizations have received numerous telephone death threats. In addition, he noted that one prominent local rabbi left the country on the advice of security personnel contracted by the Jewish community. Another prominent rabbi who was already out of the country is delaying his return indefinitely. In response to increased acts of graffiti and anti-Israel demonstrations, the Hebrew School in Caracas delayed its opening for several days. Bittan said a downtown Caracas Jewish merchant was physically assaulted on the margins of a discussion of Gaza. Bittan noted that CAIV is wary of asking for police support from the central government out of fear that the GBRV is interested in discrediting, not helping, the Jewish community.

16. (C) Bittan said he objected to public appeals by President Chavez and Foreign Minister Maduro that the Venezuelan Jewish community publicly criticize Israel's actions in Gaza. CAIV published large advertisements in major local newspapers on January 16 criticizing the GBRV's decision to sever diplomatic ties with Israel and reminding the GBRV that it has a responsibility to protect the security of all its citizens. The CAIV advertisement also notes that CAIV "shares the pain for the tragic loss of lives that the conflict has caused." Bittan told poloffs that he believes the current spate of anti-Semitism in Venezuela is worse than the summer of 2006 after the Israeli intervention in Lebanon. Well aware of the GBRV's antipathy toward the USG, CAIV is not seeking USG assistance.

Comment

17. (C) The GBRV's strong reaction to events in Gaza likely appears to have more to do with domestic politics in the lead-up to Chavez's February 15th referendum to eliminate term limits. Despite a December 17 communique signed between

President Hugo Chavez (Venezuela), President Cristina Kirchner (Argentina) and President Lula Da Silva (Brazil) promising to reduce religious intolerance and discrimination, the GBRV appears to be fanning the flames of anti-Israel feeling for political expediency. On January 5, President Chavez publicly called Israel's government "Genocidal... a government of assassins," and since then GBRV officials are vocally expressing support for the Palestinians in a way that fails to distinguish between criticism of Israel and hostility toward Jews. GBRV officials and state media outlets are regrettably engaging in sweeping and virulent attacks on Israel that are fostering an anti-Semitic environment inside Venezuela.

CAULFIELD